

Dazzling puzzle for Ledger's last role

The Imaginarium of Doctor Parnassus (PG) ★★★★★

A VISUAL feast is served up in former Monty Python cast member Terry Gilliam's fantasy – credited to "Heath Ledger and friends" – that should enthrall loyal fans of the veteran's colourful film history, but is more than likely to baffle Gilliam novices.

Breathtaking fantasy sequences and outstanding production design can't compensate for a puzzling story (by London-based American Gilliam and his regular co-writer, Charles McKeeown) that had to be re-written following the death of Heath Ledger.

Ledger, Oscar winner for *The Dark Knight*, is an intriguing character here (playing a satirical version of ex-British Prime Minister Tony Blair, obviously not one of Gilliam's preferred people), and he's again impressive.

The gap left by Ledger's death (involving fantasy sequences that were shot in Toronto) is filled by his friends, Johnny Depp, Jude Law and Colin Farrell each playing versions of his character, Tony, in elaborate sequences.

Gilliam successfully handles these transformations from actor to actor without affecting the flow of the film, where a Faustian plot uneasily meets Salvador Dali and Monty Python (complete with a sequence involving dancing and singing London bobbies).

There are elements of earlier Gilliam features, particularly *Time Bandits* and *The Adventures of Baron Munchausen*, carried over into this elaborate mix of fantasy and reality deliciously photographed by another Gilliam regular, Italian Nicola Pecorini.

The action revolves around Parnassus (Christopher Plummer, making his second film with Gilliam after *12 Monkeys*) who travels through London with a horse-drawn "imaginarium" that allows members of the audience to walk through a mirror on the stage into a fantasy world.

Parnassus, once an inveterate gambler,



HOUSE CALLS: Heath Ledger and Vern Troy in *The Imaginarium of Doctor Parnassus*.

is in debt to the devil, Mr Nick (scene-stealer Tom Waits), who granted Parnassus's wish to be immortal thousands of years ago.

Now Mr Nick has turned up again, because in another deal with the devil, the showman has promised him he'll hand over his daughter, Valentina (Lily Cole) on her forthcoming 16th birthday.

Mr Nick seems to be ready to collect.

In a bid to stop him taking possession of his beloved Valentina, Parnassus engages in a new contest with his old rival, and Tony – who has reasons of his own for taking part in the contest – is keen to be involved.

There are many fascinating sequences, and the performances, including Austin

Powers star Verne Troyer in a substantial role as Percy, are all captivating.

It's disappointing that Ledger's final role involves him in such a love it or hate it bizarre movie experience.

On the other side of Parnassus's mirror, Gilliam's film is something to marvel at, but many moviegoers probably won't stay the distance. (122 min)

HEATH LEDGER JOHNNY DEPP JUDE LAW COLIN FARRELL

THE IMAGINARIUM OF DOCTOR PARNASSUS

A FILM BY TERRY GILLIAM

PG Menacing themes, Violence and coarse language

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CENSORSHIP RATINGS

TBC This film has advertising approval. Check the classification closer to the release date.

G General

PG Parental guidance recommended

M Recommended for mature audiences

MA 15+ Not suitable for people under 15. Under 15s must be accompanied by a parent or adult guardian

R 18+ Restricted to 18 and over

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PG General

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